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FURTHER PROMOTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS, INCLUDING THE QUESTION OF THE PROGRAMME AND METHODS OF WORK OF THE COMMISSION: ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES AND WAYS AND MEANS WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM FOR IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVE ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Written statement submitted by the Federation of Cuban Women, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[23 March 1998]

1. Within the framework of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) is supporting the efforts of women everywhere to build a fairer world, in which the aspirations of all people can be accommodated on an equal footing and respect for human rights is a reality.

2. At this historic moment, FMC expresses its concern that the Declaration has had limited effect with regard to the recognition of the specific rights of women as universal rights and that it is not acknowledged that the rights of all human beings - men and women - are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated.

3. FMC attaches great value to, identifies with and is proud of the efforts of the Government of Cuba to improve the rights of Cuban women: Cuba was the first country in the world to sign the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the second to ratify this international legal instrument for the protection of the human rights of women.

4. The efforts of the Cuban Government were acknowledged by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) during its consideration of Cuba's periodic report in 1996, when it stated:

> "Despite the economic and political circumstances in which the country had found itself since 1989 as a result of the stepped-up economic blockade by the United States of America, which had had severe repercussions on the situation of women and children and had led to the deterioration of the quality of people's lives, Cuba had not ceased to go forward towards achieving full equality between the sexes."

5. Since the triumph of the Cuban Revolution on 1 January 1959, the principles of justice and social equity have reigned supreme in our country. Throughout those years, FMC, an organization of more than 3.6 million women, has been working for equality of opportunities and possibilities for women in our society, work in which we have been the close collaborators of the Cuban Government, in whose main social programmes we can see the consideration and priority given to the advancement of the status of women.

6. Today the achievements of Cuban women demonstrate the degree of development attained by women as a result of the political will of our Government, which guarantees the whole people free access to education, health, culture, sports, social security, etc. Women make up 42.5 per cent of the labour force in the civilian State sector and 65.5 per cent of the technical labour force at the intermediate and higher levels. And Cuban women account for 27.6 per cent of the members of the new Cuban Parliament elected by democratic, popular and sovereign vote. However, the full enjoyment of all the benefits of these achievements and of the rights of Cuban women is impeded by the continual acts of aggression, including acts of a biological nature, to which Cuban women are subjected, mainly as a result of the criminal economic, trade and financial blockade unilaterally imposed on our country 36 years ago, which truly constitutes a flagrant and daily violation of the human rights of

the people, and of its women and children in particular, as well as representing today the most serious manifestation of violence against Cuban women.

8. On behalf of its millions of members, FMC takes this opportunity to seek the support of the internationcal community and, in particular, of the women of the world in protesting against such inhuman aggression, which is preventing Cuban women from achieving their most legitimate and immediate aspirations; FMC also joins with its sisters throughout the world in the battle for an honourable peace, a life free of violence and a world in which the sovereignty, independence and self-determination of peoples are respected.

9. FMC endorses the great importance attached to the consensus achieved in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, which marked a historic turning point for the human rights of women. We would point out that the cornerstone of our position on this subject is the recognition of the universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated character of all human rights and the equal importance of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, including the right to development. We also call for respect for the diversity of political, economic and social models and the historical, cultural and religious characteristics of nations.